

Open Participation in Piero Manzoni's *Living Sculpture* and *Magic Base*: between Bodily Reification and the Spectacle

Abstract

In 1962, semiotician and writer Umberto Eco (Alessandria 1932 – Milan 2016) published his pivotal *The Open Work*, proposing a new awareness of the art object and developing groundbreaking perspectives on participatory art from both an aesthetic and a historical point of view. Concurrently, artist Piero Manzoni (Soncino 1933 – Milan 1963) designated his spectators works of art by applying his signature to their bodies or making them stand on ‘magic’ pedestals. In so doing, he forged a new dimension, both problematic and interactive, between author and audience. This article adopts Eco’s aesthetics to discuss Manzoni’s *Living Sculptures* and *Magic Bases* series, both from 1961. Reading Manzoni through the lens of Eco’s semiological model reveals the paradoxical nature of both series, works that disrupt the canonical opposition between audience activation and passive spectatorial consumption. The adoption of Eco’s theory, therefore, reveals the sarcastic *raison d’être* of Manzoni’s dystopian yet constructive practice. Manzoni will be also paralleled here with two contemporaneous Latin American artists, Alberto Greco and Oscar Bony, whose works manifest striking similarities but also fundamental differences. Manzoni’s approach will then also be investigated in light of the theories of Guy Debord and Julio Le Parc.